

Sports

2010 NASCAR Preview

By TOM KLEMICK Last year was a year to remember for the NASCAR Sprint Cup series. STAFF WRITER
GTK5002@PSU.EDU Jimmie Johnson became the first driver in history to win four straight championships. Hendrick Motorsports domination continued as Johnson and his teammates Mark Martin and Jeff Gordon finished 1-2-3 in the Sprint Cup point standings. Tony Stewart flourished as an owner/driver. Dale Earnhardt Jr. had the worst season of his career. Juan Pablo Montoya and Brian Vickers surprised many by making the 2009 Chase for the Championship. Carl Edwards and Kyle Busch were disappointments after stellar performances in 2008. With a new season beginning this month, it's time to look forward to 2010.

What is for certain is that on February 14, Martin and Earnhardt Jr. will have led the field to the 52nd Daytona 500 green flag and one driver will be forever immortalized by winning "the great American race." After that, it's anyone's guess. Here are the predictions for the 2010 Chase for the Sprint Cup as well as the Sprint Cup champion.

Kyle Busch, No. 18 M&M's Toyota: Busch won four races last year but his lack of consistency kept him from making the Chase. He's loaded with talent but his lack of maturity remains his biggest foe. He made just as many headlines in 2009 for his post race antics as he did for his on track success. If he can be more consistent this year, Kyle should be a lock for the 2010 Chase.

Kurt Busch, No. 2 Miller Lite Dodge: After missing the Chase in 2008, Busch rebounded nicely last season by having his best year since winning the championship in 2004. He won two races and finished fourth in the Cup standings. The biggest challenge for Busch will be adapting to new crew chief Steve Addington. If all goes smoothly, you can expect to see Kurt back in the Chase this year.

Carl Edwards, No. 99 Aflac Ford: What happened to Carl Edwards? That's the question everyone was asking in 2009. After winning a series' best nine races and falling just short of a Cup title in 2008, he went winless last year and finished 11th in the standings. He'll rebound and win a race in 2010 but only time will tell if he'll be a serious championship contender once again.

Jeff Gordon, No. 24 DuPont Chevrolet: Gordon had a good but not great season last year. He won just one race but finished second eight times. Add to that a third place points finish and you've got an impressive year for anyone else. But we've come to expect more from the four-time champ. I expect more than a sole victory for Gordon in 2010, but if he plans on winning his fifth championship he'll have to knock off his teammate.

Denny Hamlin, No. 11 FedEx Toyota: Hamlin finished strong last year by winning the Homestead season finale. He visited victory lane on three other occasions as well and is a popular preseason favorite to challenge Johnson for Cup series supremacy. But a torn ACL in his knee during the offseason could hinder him in his title hunt. He has the talent. The only unknown is his health.

Kevin Harvick, No. 29 Pennzoil Chevrolet: Harvick could be considered a dark horse pick for the Chase after a terrible season last year. He went winless and had just nine top ten finishes. It's also common knowledge that he's not happy with his current situation at Richard Childress Racing and he's considered one of next year's hottest free agents. But after winning the season opening exhibition race at Daytona, look for him to surprise a lot of people this year.

Jimmie Johnson, No. 48 Lowe's Chevrolet: What can you say? The defending champ is the best in the game right

now. He's also cementing his place as one of NASCAR's all time best. His four straight Sprint Cup championships speak for themselves. Johnson has won 24 races the past three seasons and he's the easiest Chase pick of the year. The real question is: can anyone stop Jimmie Johnson's historic reign?

Matt Kenseth, No. 17 Crown Royal Ford: Kenseth won last year's Daytona 500 and followed it up by winning the next race at California. He then proceeded to drop like a rock through the standings and miss the Chase for the first time in his career. Kenseth's got a change of sponsor this season in Crown Royal. He'd also like to change last year's result and get back to his consistent ways in 2010.

Mark Martin, No. 5 GoDaddy.com Chevrolet: Martin proved that age (51 years young) is just a number in 2009. After running a part-time schedule the previous two years, Martin returned with a bang winning five races and seven poles. He also finished second in the championship standings for the fifth time in his illustrious career. Only he and Johnson have made the Chase every year they've competed full time. Could this be the year Martin finally wins that elusive championship?

Juan Pablo Montoya, No. 42 Target Chevrolet: Montoya was without a doubt the surprise of the year in 2009. He made the Chase and was one bad pit stop away from winning at Indianapolis in August. He disappeared down the stretch during NASCAR's postseason but if he can be as consistent as he was last summer he should be back in the Chase in 2010.

Ryan Newman, No. 39 US Army Chevrolet: Newman was another of last season's biggest surprises. After leaving Penske Racing and joining Tony Stewart at the newly formed Stewart-Haas Racing, he made his first Chase since 2005. His crash at Talladega was one of the scariest of the year but I expect his 2010 campaign to be remembered more for his on track performance than his on track trouble.

Tony Stewart, No. 14 Office Depot Chevrolet: We knew Stewart was good but how many people knew he was this good? He left Joe Gibbs Racing, formed his own team, won four races (plus the All-Star race), led the standings all summer and finished sixth in points. Not many thought that Stewart-Haas Racing would be this good, this fast. When talking about drivers who can knock off Johnson in 2010, Stewart's name is at the top of the list.

Best of the rest: Greg Biffle, Kasey Kahne, Jeff Burton, Brian Vickers, Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Champion: Jimmie Johnson: Every year people pick against him and every year he makes them look like fools. I've learned my lesson. Johnson and crew chief Chad Knaus have the Chase format figured out and until someone ends their run at the top I'm not picking against them. Look for Tony Stewart, Mark Martin and Denny Hamlin to give him a run for his money, but at the end of the day it's Johnson's title to lose. Each year brings new competition and each year the outcome is the same. His drive for five begins now. The road to the Sprint Cup championship runs through Jimmie Johnson.

Other things to keep an eye on include Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s attempt to rebound after his dismal 2009 season, Danica Patrick's first foray into NASCAR, the struggling economy's effect on the sport and rule changes that encourage drivers not to be afraid to mix it up on the track. There's a lot to watch for in 2010. The next Sprint Cup race takes place at the Auto Club Speedway in California on February 21st. It airs at 3 PM on FOX.

Zangari Double-Double Not Enough

Nicola Zangari's (Etters, Pa./Red Land) fifth career double-double was no match for Lancaster Bible College's dominating second half performance Wednesday February 3rd, in which the hosting Chargers beat Penn State Harrisburg, 57-50.

Although struggling from the field scoring 21 points on 6-for-27 shooting in the first half, the Lady Lions buckled down on defense holding Lancaster Bible College to only 23 points, 10-for-26 from the field.

Lancaster Bible would open the second half with a 14-4 run to increase their lead to 14 with 12:55 remaining. But the blue and white would turn things around bringing their deficit to one after two free throws from Zangari with 3:22 remaining.

The Chargers would close the half on a 9-3 run to capture the 57-50 victory.

Zangari finished with 20 points, shooting 7-for-15 from the field, adding 10 rebounds and three steals. Stephanie Yetter (Thompstontown, PA/East Juniata) collected 16 points to go along with six rebounds. Brittany Adams (Dillsburg, PA/Northern) finished with a game-high 11 rebounds.

Story courtesy of Penn State Harrisburg Intercollegiate Athletics Department.

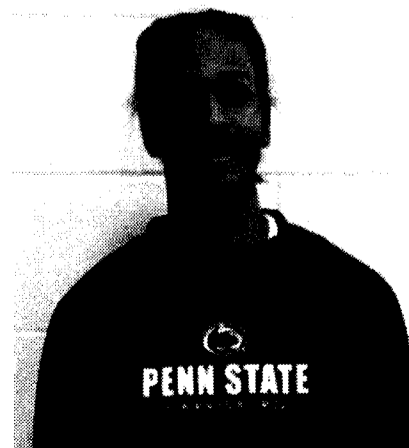
Steve Jones Gains Second NEAC Award

Penn State Harrisburg's Steve Jones (Harrisburg, PA/Harrisburg) was selected as the North Eastern Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Student-Athlete of the Week for the week ending February 7th.

Jones, a 6'0" freshman guard led the Nittany Lions to a 1-0 week with a 92-78 win over Lancaster Bible College, in which he tallied 27 points, 10 steals, 6 rebounds, 3 assists, going 3-for-3 from the foul line, and shooting .545 from the field.

Jones recorded his third career double-double this week while setting a school record 10 steals which also would be the most by any player this season in NCAA DIII play. Jones receives this award for the second time this season.

Story courtesy of Penn State Harrisburg Intercollegiate Athletics Department.



Pictured is Steve Jones
Photo courtesy of PSH Intercollegiate Athletics Department